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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000030

SIPDIS

NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
DEPT FOR SA/FO, AMBASSADOR QUINN, SA/PAB, S/CT, SA/A
CENTCOM FOR POLAD
REL NATO/AUST/NZ/ISAF

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PRT-QALAT: GOVERNOR FIRES SHAMULZAI DISTRICT CHIEF,
CHASTISES ELDERS FOR DEALING WITH TALIBAN

1. (U) Summary: Zabul Provincial Governor Arman used a carrot and stick approach (local autonomy and good officials; development projects) and argued both Islam and geopolitics at a shura to try to convince Shamulzai district elders not to deal with the Taliban. While Arman is willing to fire incompetent district officials, he realizes real change will occur only if the elders can be convinced to support the central government. End Summary.

Background

2. (U) Shamulzai District in southeastern Zabul Province borders Pakistan. In November, the provincial governor had fired the Shamulzai district chief and replaced him with the Skinkay district chief, who had not yet arrived at his new post. In the interim, the Shamulzai district chief of police was also relieved. Thereafter, someone allegedly 'burned down' the ANP compound in Shamulzai village, burned a number of vehicles and stole 30 AK-47 rifles. The original report to the PRT was that striking ANP officers had done this, at the direction of the relieved police chief, to whom they were loyal. The relieved chief, in turn, claimed it was a Taliban attack. Governor Arman told PRToff that President Karzai was upset about this incident when he had seen the president in Kabul, and that the governor believed both the elders and officials there had made a deal with the Taliban whereby they would not conduct attacks in Shamulzai if they were left alone as they transited Shamulzai going from Pakistan to northern Zabul Province. On December 4, the governor flew out to Shamulzai for a shura, accompanied by Provincial Chief of Police Nabi, the local ANA battalion commander, several other officials, plus TF Rock (Task Force Rock is the US maneuver battalion in the province) staffer CPT Kelly, and PRToff.

Inspecting the ANP Compound

3. (U) In addition to the shura with the elders, the governor and his entourage inspected the ANP compound. Fire damage was minimal, and none of the vehicles burned had been operational. Although most suspected the former police chief of culpability, the Governor resisted demands to immediately physically remove him, and left him in Shamulzai pending a formal investigation. He was kept under watch by TF Rock, who moved a squad into the ANP compound. The Governor also refused to immediately fire the missing police officers, being more concerned with recovery of their weapons. (Note: Most ANP have had no training and are ill-equipped. They and other local forces, such as the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP), often behave more like private militias and follow their chiefs with no apparent loyalty to the national government (such as demonstrated by this incident). End note.)

Lecturing the Elders on Religion and Geopolitics

4. (U) While the governor can fire district officials, he cannot dismiss the tribal elders of a village or district. Having good reason to suspect the elders had reached a bargain with the Taliban, at least implicitly, of not interfering with their transit if they leave Shamulzai District alone, the governor focused most of his time and energy, and that of the other officials, on the shura with the district elders.

5. (U) An estimated 150 men attended the shura, district and village elders but also middle aged and young men. The Governor's performance included 'reading them the riot act,' but also a good cop/bad cop interaction with other officials, offering both carrots and sticks. He explained that the villagers and their families will be the ones to lose if the on-going road improvement project is halted, along with other projects. He pointed out the new road between Shamulzai and Shinkay (the next district capital,

between Shamulzai and Qalat) had cut the travel time from four hours to two hours in that direction. He then sharply reminded the shura attendees that it was not in accordance with Islam to harm people and destroy things (which the transiting Taliban went on to do elsewhere). He lectured them for being shameless, gutless and working for other people, and not acting in accordance with Islam.

16. (U) Next he proclaimed that the five years lack of water was God's punishment because the Taliban had closed schools and hospitals. God was especially punishing Zabul and Kandahar provinces, he continued, due to the Taliban's murder of women and children there. He continued that the country needed laws to supplement the Koran, not replace it, noting that the first law passed was to name the country the Islamist Republic of Afghanistan, and that one can follow the Koran and still be democratic. He added that women in refugee camps voted, leaders voted, mullahs voted, and in September, two religious people had been elected in the provincial elections. Only the Taliban had not voted. He added that President Karzai had been selected by educated, Muslim scholars, and that it was against Islam to fight him. Going back in history, he stated that when Ali was not selected to succeed the Prophet Mohammed, he did not respond by burning or destroying mosques.

17. (U) He then switched briefly from the religious to the geopolitical, noting that Pakistan has hospitals, roads and schools, and that they don't burn them down, but send people here to Afghanistan to burn these things down, and that Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to have hospitals and schools. He concluded by threatening to return the \$180,000 the GoA had given him for education in Shamulzai, and asked rhetorically who loses if all district schools are closed.

18. (U) Governor Arman was followed by the new district police chief, who noted that the district would now be getting more ANA and ANP guidance and involvement in trying to halt Taliban infiltration. He addressed the young, stressing their right to attend school, and asking rhetorically if it is good for one to be illiterate, and therefore only able to work for someone else. He also ended on a geopolitical note, saying that many Afghan sons die because the Pakistanis teach them to fight standing up, but noting that Iran victimizes Afghanistan as well.

19. (U) The new district director, who had recently arrived from Shinkay village, spoke next. He urged the villagers to support the government and not lose aid because of a few bad people. A local mullah came next, stating that education is important for all, including females, based on the Koran. He accused the Taliban of 'making up' Koranic verses.

110. (U) Provincial police chief Nabi spoke next, somewhat playing the 'good cop' to the Governor's 'bad cop.' He urged the villagers not to let the Taliban stay among them. However, he also admitted that they had a tough border area with Pakistan. He said that he would ask Governor Arman not to stop all aid projects in Shamulzai.

111. (SBU) The ANA battalion commander (who is also a mullah) also combined Islam and regional geopolitics. He accused the Pakistanis of using uneducated Afghans "like donkeys" and stressed the need for education. He continued that the Taliban do not follow the Koran by murdering and maiming people, and that they were hypocritical when in power, such as by prohibiting VCR tapes for others while keeping their own. He contrasted Shamulzai to his home district up north, which has had three years of peace and lots of development, noting that that could happen in Shamulzai also if not for five or six thieves running things there. Stressing that one needs security for development, he said the government planned to build a border town in the district to help, while noting that the Shamulzai people also lose when the Pakistanis pay the Taliban to kill people and destroy buildings in Afghanistan.

112. (U) The Governor then invited the two Americans present to make remarks. CPT Kelly noted that the guns were stolen from the people of Shamulzai, not from TF Rock, adding that they were donated to the ANP by Hungary, a country that - like Afghanistan - had once been under Soviet control. PRToff noted that the US is a religious country and respects Islam.

Aftermath

113. (SBU) As of December 21, the Governor had not yet reviewed the formal investigation results, and 17 out of the 30 rifles were still missing. There is no word yet on disciplinary actions against individual ANP officers. During a PRT trip on 14 and 15 Dec (septel), PRT and UNOPS engineers met with village leaders in Shamulzai village and the border village of Zanjshir (also in Shamulzai District) to discuss the layout and location for planned schools and

clinics, reinforcing `the carrot' that the district could continue to receive development aid if the government approved it.

Comment

14. (SBU) Whether the governor's shura, and the change in district officials, will change the situation in Shamulzai remains an open question. The reach of the central government in remote districts is very tenuous, plus there is a limited pool of honest, effective officials that can be appointed. As the governor realizes, it is key to convince the local leaders and elders to support the central government.

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